

Message Text

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21-12

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DRC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 INR-10

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R 051025Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4805

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY BONN

USNATO 1287

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE VALLETTA 1969

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, MT

SUBJ: REFERENDUM ON GOZO CIVIC COUNCIL

REF: VALLETTA 1327

1. JUSTICE MIN BUTTIGIEG INTRODUCED NOTION ON SUBJECT OCT 1 AND TABLED QUESTION WHICH READS AS FOLLOWS: "DO YOU WANT GOZO TO REMAIN DIFFERENT FROM MALTA, NAMELY THAT IN ADDITION TO HAVING REPRESENTATIVES IN PARLIAMENT ELECTED FROM GOZO, IT WILL ALSO HAVE REPRESENTATIVES ON THE GOZO CIVIC COUNCIL WITH, AMONGST OTHER POWERS, THE POWER TO LEVY SPECIAL TAXATION BY GOZITANS WITH A VIEW TO BEING SPENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WISHES OF THE PEOPLE OF GOZO?"

2. BUTTIGIEG MAINTAINED THAT BOTH GOM AND MLP COMPLETELY NEUTRAL AND THAT MAIN REASON FOR REFERENDUM IS OBVIOUS LACK OF GOZITAN INTEREST IN THE COUNCIL AS EVIDENCED BY POOR VOTER TURNOUT, SMALL NUMBER OF CANDIDATES FOR COUNCIL SEATS, AND FREQUENT LACK OF COUNCIL QUORUM. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN SAID NATS OPPOSE BOTH REFERENDUM AND QUESTION, WHICH IN HIS VIEW

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PLACES UNFAIR EMPHASIS ON TAXATION RIGHTS OF COUNCIL. DEBATE

ON SECOND READING CONCLUDED WITH MINTOFF STATEMENT THAT GOM
WILL INTERPRET TURNOUT LESS THAN SIXTY PERCENT TO MEAN
GOZITANS NO LONGER WANT COUNCIL.

3. ALTHOUGH SOME MALTA PARISHES HAVE MORE OR LESS ACTIVE AND
MOSTLY VOLUNTARY LOCAL CIVIC COUNCILS, THE GOZO COUNCIL IS THE
ONLY ONE ESTABLISHED BY LAW AND WITH FINANCIAL POWERS.
ITS BUDGETS ARE FINANCED BY GOM GRANTS AND IT HAVE YET TO EXERCISE
ITS SPECIAL REVENUE-COLLECTING POWERS, PROBABLY BECAUSE
IT HAS CONSISTENTLY RUN SIZABLE SURPLUSES (900,000
BY END OF FY 1972/73).

4. COMMENT: NATS, WHO DO NOT FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT ISSUE,
OPPOSE REFERENDUM AS PART OF GENERAL POLICY TO CONSISTENTLY
VOTE AGAINST GOM INITIATIVES.

5. QUESTION APPEARS DELIBERATELY CONFUSING. WHILE WANTING
THE SAME (OR PREFEREABLY BETTER) TREATMENT AS MALTA IN TERMS
OF BENEFITS, GOZITANS ARE WELL KNOWN FOR THEIR INDIVIDUALITY.
THEY ARE EQUALLY WELL KNOWN FOR THEIR THRIFTINESS, AND PROS-
PECT OF TAXES ADDITIONAL TO WHAT THEY AND MALTESE PAY AT SAME
RATES CERTAINLY WOULD NOT BE WELCOME.

6. REGARDLESS OF BUTTIGIEG'S DISCLAIMERS, REFERENDUM WILL
HAVE STRONG POLITICAL COLORATION, AND GOOD TURNOUT AND
MAJORITY YES VOTE OBVIOUSLY WOULD BE A BLOW TO MINTOFF.
A NO MAJORITY WOULD BE VERY SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL VICTORY,
AND MIGHT CONCEIVABLY LEAD HIM TO USE SIMILAR TACTIC ON CONSTI-
TUTIONAL ISSUES AS DESCRIBED REFTEL.
GETZ

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